

MIGRATION PROCESS INFLUENCE ON THE CONSTRUING OF SACRAL SPACE¹

მიგრაციული პროცესების გავლენა საკრალური სივრცის კონსტრუირებაზე

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Abstract

Processes of migration and the transformations resulted after them represent the most topical issue for modern Georgia and the world. How do migration and new housing environment impact on the construing of sacral space among migrants? This article focuses on eco-migrants that migrated from highland zone of Georgia, Svaneti to the lowlands in last quarter of 20th century. We will represent different examples of construing sacral spaces among eco-migrants depending on the type of settlement in new areas. Purpose of the research is, on the basis of study of migration process ongoing in Svaneti, to reveal and study the psychological-mental relation, which connects the personality with origin place. This relation, besides material culture, especially clearly is shown in spiritual culture of the population.

Migrated population continues to live in the multiethnic society of the lowland in terms sharply different from the highland conditions. It becomes a member of this society and establishes some relations with it. The migrants coming to the lowlands bring about those psychological-mental sentiments, which connect them with their origin place. These sentiments were reflected in urban planning of the new environment, in distribution of housing and sacral space. Events appear quite unusual for Svaneti traditional life. It is known that the Svan towers had a defensive significance in origin place but in some places migrants started to build miniature tower-like constructions on the graves to identify their origin. Migrants try to observe the principle of settlement, which existed in Svaneti traditional life. Housing and sacral spaces in places of their new settlements is organized by taking into consideration the environment terms and psychological-mental thinking of the migrants. This process outlines many interesting and yet-unstudied nuances.

Some scholars consider that shrines and ritual practice of Svaneti life originates from the Christian traditions. In new settlement places the migrants met old, abandoned Christian churches or ruins of shrines. They consider it their obligation to restore the shrines, to take care of them with reverence, though it is interesting that in most cases the migrants do not continue to hold folk holidays and rituals around these shrines. Unfortunately, in some cases of arbitrary restoration of these shrines, resulted in loss or distortion of cultural heritage. Next to the old shrines they start to build new ones. At the same time, the migrants try to build separately those shrines of their villages or their families, which were considered to be the strongest sacral centers in the places of their old settlement. The person, knowing traditional construction technologies, usually builds these shrines exactly by the architectural nuances preserved in the first

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dwelling. Despite this, these new shrines still fail to replace old ones being in mentality of the migrants, which is clearly reflected in their emotional sentiments. On the other hand, this is not true for all eco-

migrants living in Kvemo Kartli. In Tsalka district of Kvemo Kartli eco-migrants tend to continue their folk holidays around old churches or restored small shrines. Why do we have two main different ways of construing sacral spaces and performing religious rituals around them?

Keywords: Migration, Transformation, Identity, Culture, Sacral spaces.

თეონა კვანჭიანი

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აბსტრაქტი

მიგრაციული პროსეცები და ამ პროცესების შედეგად მომხდარი ცვლილებები თანამედრევე საქართველოს და მსოფლიოს აქტუალური საკითხია. რა გავლენას ახდენს მიგრაციული პროცესები და ახალი საცხოვრებელი გარემო საკრალური სივრცის კონსტრუირებაზე? საკვლევი თემა ეხება XX საუკუნის ბოლო მეოთხედში საქართველოს მთიანი ზოლიდან, სვანეთიდან მოსახლეობის ბარად მიგრირებას.

მიგრირებული მოსახლეობა ცხოვრებას განაგრძობს მთის პირობებისაგან მკვეთრად განსხვავებულ, ბარის მულტიეთნიკურ საზოგადოებაში. ის ხდება ამ საზოგადოების წევრი და გარკვეულ კავშირ-ურთიერთობებს ამყარებს მასთან. ბარად მოსულ მიგრანტებს თან მოჰყვებათ ის ფსიქოლოგიურ მენტალური განწყობები, რაც აკავშირებთ თავიანთ პირველსაცხოვრისთან. ეს განწყობები აისახა ახალი გარემოს ურბანულ დაგეგმარებაში, საცხოვრებელი და საკრალური სივრცის განაწილებაში. ჩნდება სვანეთის ტრადიციული ყოფისათვის ერთობ უჩვეულო მოვლენები. მიგრატა ერთმა ნაწილმა, საკუთარი წარმომავლობის იდენტიფიცირებისათვის საფლავებზე მინიატურული კომპური ნაგებობების აშენება დაიწყო, თუმცა, ცნობილია, რომ სვანეთის ტრადიციულ ყოფაში კომპს ძირითადად თავდაცვითი ფუნქცია გააჩნდა. მიგრანტები ცდილობენ დაიცვან დასახლების ის პრინციპი, რომელიც სვანეთის ტრადიციულ ყოფაში არსებობდა. ახალი დასახლების ადგილებში საცხოვრებელი სივრცის ორგანიზება ხდება გარემო პირობებისა და მიგრანტი მოსახლეობის ფსიქოლოგიურ-მენტალური აზროვნების გათვალისწინებით. ამ პროცესში იკვეთება ბევრი საინტერესო და აქამდე შეუსწავლელი ნიუანსი. მეცნიერთა ერთი ნაწილის გააზრებით, სვანეთის ყოფაში არსებული სალოცავები და მათ გარშემო მიმდინარე სარიტუალო პრაქტიკა ქრისტიანული ტრადიციებიდან უნდა იღებდეს სათავეს. მიგრანტებს ახალი ჩასახლების ადგილებში ხშირად ხვდებათ ძველი, მიტოვებული ქრისტიანული ეკლესიები ან სალოცავთა ნანგრევები. ისინი თავს ვალდებულად თვლიან აღადგინონ სალოცავთა ნანგრევები, მოუფრთხილდნენ და კრძალვით მოეპყრონ მათ, თუმცა საინტერესოა, რომ უმეტეს შემთხვევაში მიგრანტები არ აგრძელებენ ამ სალოცავთა გარშემო თავიანთი ხალხური დღეობებისა და რიტუალების გამართვას. ძველ სალოცავთა გვერდით იწყებენ ახალი

სალოცავების აშენებას. ამასთანავე, მიგრანტები ცდილობენ ცალ-ცალკე ააგონ თავიანთი სოფლისა თუ საგვარეულოს ის სალოცავი, რომელიც ძველი განსახლების ადგილას ყველაზე ძლიერ საკრალურ ცენტრად ითვლებოდა. სალოცავს აშენებს ტრადიციული სამშენებლო ტექნოლოგიების მცოდნე პირი, ზუსტად იმ არქიტექტურული ნიუანსების გათვალისწინებით, როგორც ეს პირველსაცხოვრისში იყო დაცული. მიუხედავად, ამისა ეს ახალი სალოცავები, მაინც ვერ ანაცვლებენ მიგრანტთა მენტალურ გააზრებაში მყოფ ძველ სალოცავებს, რაც მათ ემოციურ განწყობებშიც ნათლად აისახება. კვლევის მიზანია, სვანეთში მიმდინარე მიგრაციული პროცესების შესწავლის საფუძველზე გამოავლინოს და შეისწავლოს ის ფსიქოლოგიურ-მენტალური კავშირი, რომელიც პიროვნებას აკავშირებს თავის პირველსაცხოვრისთან. ეს კავშირი გარდა მატერიალური კულტურისა, განსაკუთრებით ნათლად წარმოჩნდება მოსახლეობის სულიერ კულტურაზე.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: მიგრაცია, ტრანსფორმაცია, იდენტობა, კულტურა, საკრალური ცენტრი.

Introduction

Many scientific disciplines are interested in study of migration processes, among them different directions of the humanitarian and social field study these processes with special intensity: history, ethnology, anthropology, geography, etc. Cooperation with related disciplines within our concrete research topic implies intensive application of the issues studied in different aspects by various fields. Migration is one of the most important and urgent issues in modern Georgia and the world. How does the local problem we have raised respond to the world global problem existing from this viewpoint? Each personality, as a member of society and definite collective, apprehends his own self as a part of concrete environment. He is connected with this environment with his psychological-mental ideas that is conditioned by different factors. After collective migration concept “we” as a strong sense of community and “they” appears in migrants’ subconsciousness. Other markers of ethnic self-consciousness also appear. In their turn, similar markers appear within one ethnos, also in local ethnic groups living in various geographic areas. Respectively, in any space of the world, during internal and external processes caused by different reasons, the migrants are followed by their psychological-mental connection with their origin place and collective thinking. “*sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to their group, and shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together*” (McMillan & Chavis 1986: 6) Ethno-demographic, social and cultural environment eco-migrants met in new settlement places were dramatically different from their ethnographic areas. Historically and today also, along with the Georgians the representatives of the non-Georgian ethnic groups lived and live in Kvemo Kartli.

In last quarter of 20th century mass migration processes start from the highland part of Georgia – Svaneti, the main factors of which are considered to be ecological catastrophes. Besides ecological factors, the reason of large-scale migration of the population was lack of land. This is also proved by the research conducted by us in the period of field works among eco-migrants between 2017 and 2020. Population migrated also from those villages of Svaneti that did not experience the natural disasters. As it is known, people migrate for different reasons as they want to have more comfortable life. Hence, migrants plan their livelihood considering their available capital and resources – livelihood is the management of sustaining life. (Mallick & Sultana & Bennett 2020, Chambers & Conway 1992, Serrat, 2017). One part of scientific literature claims that people do not migrate for ecological factors, but also to have better livelihood options and conditions (Piguet 2018). According to our eco-migrant narrators, along with ecological problems they faced in mountainous villages, livelihood sustainability was the most important problem. However, migrants are mostly mentioned with the status of eco-migrants. The state was interested in settling the

migrants in that part of the lowland of Georgia, where the Georgian population was in ethnic minority. One of such main centers was Kvemo (Lower) Kartli, where numerous compact settlements appeared. Refugee Svans from Abkhazia and Kodori Gorge also settled in places designated for eco-migrant Svans.

Examples of construing sacral space among eco-migrants outline their connection with origin place and culture. This connection is seen in a new living area in various forms. This universal phenomenon in our concrete case is studied on the example of the population migrated from Svaneti to the lowlands. While studying the psychological-mental relation, first of all, attention is concentrated on folk beliefs, in which this moment is most clearly shown. In their turn, opinions in the scientific literature on the Svan folk beliefs are not uniform and are disputable. The events developed in the process of migration should answer many questions.

Methodology

The research is based on the ethnographic materials gathered among eco-migrants living in different villages and cities of Kvemo kartli Region of Georgia. First stage of the research was so-called “office work” which means to familiarize and process scientific source, literature and yet-unstudied archive funds by Vera Bardavelidze and Arsen Oniani preserved at Ivane Javakhishvili Institute of History and Ethnology. Directly in the field work was used non-formalized, open and according to the researchers’ involvement – participant observation. In the period of field work was compiled a field-ethnographic diary, in which was fixed materials, fixation of which by audio-visual technique is impossible. Along with the method of observation, for determination of importance of gathering the primary ethnographic material, we used the method of questioning. From two forms of questioning – interview and questionnaire, our priority was the method of interview, because the method of questionnaire is of comparatively formalized character and leaves less space for free questions. It was also a priority to us to know the local language of the target focus-group – the Svan language. For analysis of socio-historical data and explanation of separate phenomena, was used also the method of close description, critical analyze and visual anthropology, which enabled us to show the written material obtained in the field visually – by photos and video material.

Discussion and results

In result of our research in the background of study of the migration processes in Svaneti we tried to outline the elements of Svaneti history and culture unstudied and unrevealed up to the present day. Numerous scientific works were published by the scholars interested in different fields of humanitarian and social sciences. These works were dedicated to eco-migrants and those migrated from Svaneti. Among them should be mentioned modern ethnological researches conducted among the migrated population by Khatuna Ioseliani, Giorgi Gotsiridze, and others. (Ioseliani, 2008; Gotsiridze, 2011) But the issue has not been studied yet concerning sacral space construing examples and the role of psychological-mental relation of the migrants with their origin place. Study of this relation can explain many facts not only about the processes ongoing in the environment new for the migrants, but for clarifying the essence of different phenomena in the first dwelling of the migrants. Psychological-mental relation of the personality seems especially well in the analysis of folk aspects of the sacral center. Any sacral center and beliefs connected with it, being in the first dwelling, had concrete features causing its existence. On the example of Svaneti traditional life in the process of researching and clarifying the essence of these features special contribution was done by outstanding Georgian ethnologist Vera Bardavelidze. In her published works and archive materials the talk is on many sacral centers and beliefs connected with them (Bardavelidze, 1953) Many considerations are expressed about their origination from archaic, Christian or local life conditions. Numerous terms are mentioned, one part of which is explained at the level of assumptions. In frequent cases their concrete origin is not clear.

Housing environment, the eco-migrants met, differs from that traditional ethnographic environment of the highland, in which Svan eco-migrants lived. Some elements of traditional life and culture in different ethnographic parts of Georgia were established for centuries in compliance with geographic environment. Life in highlands and lowlands was different. In the process of migration of highland population to the lowlands and their adaptation, numerous cultural elements changed, and a great part of them even fully disappeared, because in new geographic environment there no longer was any need for their existence. This process is clearly seen on the example of folk rituals associated with weather dedicated holidays. Most of these rituals are disappeared among migrants living in lowlands. First generation migrants remember the dates and forms of these kind of rituals while their descendants have no information about their existence. Besides this, in the background of transformation in geographic environment and migration, can be changed understanding of different elements of traditional culture of Svaneti. For example, it is considered that social differentiation in Georgia was the event characteristic for the highlands and was proved only in low part of Zemo (Higher) Svaneti, i.e. the part owned by the Dadeshkeliani family. In the scientific literature no talk is about differentiation of religious-social character existing among the families of Svaneti, existence of which is proved by the institute of the so-called ‘mulson’ being in Kvemo (Lower) Svaneti.

Descriptive material on this institute is delivered by ethnographer Arsen Oniani. The material is preserved in the archives of Iv. Javakhishvili Institute of History and Ethnology and is not properly studied yet. The present material clarifies that all the strong shrines of Kvemo Svaneti have their “mulsons” – experts in folk customs, habits and rituals. Only representatives of concrete families can be mulsons. People believe that God takes for sacrifice only the gifts brought to the shrine by mulson, a member of a concrete family. At the same time He also determined what part of the gift should remain for the shrine, in private ownership of a mulson. As we see, the state of being a mulson is based on the family principle and is inherited by son from father. It is some strong religious-social institute which gives serious economic and social privileges for the concrete family. This institute is somehow directly connected with concrete terms of highland Svaneti is clearly proved also by the fact that among Svans migrated to the lowlands this institute has not disappeared, but lost the term “mulson” itself and its privileged status. It is interesting fact that among the migrants still exists the need for such a personality, who knows well the folk customs-habits and rituals. This person should lead the folk holidays, but he has no religious, social or economic privileges any longer. As it seems, just because of this a new term “starosta” (the term might come from the Russian word “староста” (meaning the “elder”, head person) is established in the new environment instead of the old term.

Religious practice and construing sacral spaces among migrants took an important role in forming new life and adaptation with new areas “Migrants are more, rather than less, religious after migration” (Hinnells, 1997:683) Svaneti population that migrated from the highland to the lowland does not break psychological-mental connection with origin place and tried to match the new housing environment to the housing principles existing in the first dwelling. Naturally, sharply different terms of highlands and lowlands restrict them and in this process numerous interesting nuances are outlined that generate the need for new understanding of many issues. As it is above-mentioned in frequent cases the migrants in the places of their new settlement meet old Christian shrines existing there before or their ruins. Such example is Tchivtchavi village of Tetrtskaro district. Some areas of this territory were separated for eco-migrants with standard living houses by the government of Georgia. There were settled eco-migrants from one territorial unit of Kvemo Svaneti. In this area the migrants met old abandoned churches or ruins of shrines. They restored old shrines, take care of them with great reverence. It’s however, interesting why they did not continue the tradition of holding the folk holidays around these shrines? Instead of this, just there, in several meter distance, they start building of new shrines considered to be an analogous copy of the old one that had the function of the strongest sacral center. Architectural planning of a shrine is fulfilled in the form analogous to the old shrine, though the new shrines cannot replace old sacral centers remaining in the migrants’ thinking and this is clearly seen by observations over the migrants’ emotions. For example, if the migrated Svans are sorry or glad of anything, immediately in their mind appears the strongest shrine in Svaneti, in

their community or their family along with curses or blessings in the name of these shrines. Collective settlement principles of eco-migrants from the same villages might be considered as a main reason of need to organize sacral space in accordance with old ones. In contrast with some eco-migrants whose settlement areas became mixed settled. In the areas where such kind of settlement type revealed, population did not follow the same patterns of organizing sacral centers in accordance of old ones existed in their origin places. In Tsalka district of Kvemo kartli region population migrated from different territorial units of Upper (Zemo) Svaneti. Besides that, eco-migrants living there had not organized collective housing areas separated like Tchivtchavi eco-migrants had done by the government of Georgia. They met there abandoned living houses left by Turkish spoken orthodox Christian Greeks. The issue is that, these houses still officially belong to them. This should be considered as a main factor for eco-migrants settled in Tsalka district not to belong themselves to this area. They consider it as “enough” to restore ruined shrines or continue their folk rituals around old Christian Greek build churches. In case of Dmanisi district of kvemo kartli where is also fixed mixed settlement examples, eco-migrants settled in new areas specially organized for them with standard eco-migrant houses by the government of Georgia though they did not meet old shrines. Hence, immediately after the migration they gathered together to discuss which church to build. It was decided as a result of voting to build St. George church.

Conclusion:

Migration, settlement principles and migrants psychological-mental connection with their origin place have great impact on the construing of sacral and urban spaces. Collective settlement principle of migrant population leads to strengthen the need of connection among two reality – old and new spaces which is especially clearly seen by the way how they organize sacral centers around them.

Some elements of our traditional life are caused by the need of concrete geographical environment, as it revealed in our concrete case of “Mulsoni” institution, the process of migration has showed that even though migrants need the person who knows well the folk custom-habits and rituals in order to lead folk rituals, in new environment is has completely transformed and lost its main features.

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